THE UNITED STATES TO 1877

HIS 133-009 W 4:00-6:30

Instructor: Dr. Randi Cox
Office: Liberal Arts, room 356
Hours: MW 2:30-4:00 and TR 11:30-12:25, and by appointment
Cell: 936-645-6727 (I usually respond to texts right away.)
Email: rcox@sfasu.edu
Website: https://d2l.sfasu.edu/ (Also accessible through MySFA. Call x1919 for assistance.)

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

A comprehensive survey of American history from early explorations through Reconstruction. Meets Texas state requirements for all graduates.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO DO AND LEARN IN THIS CLASS (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES)

1. You will learn how to approach history as a way of reasoning about the past, just as professional historians do. By the end of the session, you will understand that history is about critical thinking and interpretation, not about memorizing facts.

2. You will develop core skills that scholars use to support historical reasoning. You will gather and analyze evidence from primary and secondary sources, make connections between sources, assess change over time, compare multiple perspectives, identify causes and turning points, construct sound arguments, etc. In particular we will focus on the “Five Cs of Historical Reasoning” described on p. 2 of this syllabus.

3. You will broaden and deepen your understanding of seven key questions in early American history, each of which shape how Americans define their nation today.

4. You will practice historical reasoning skills in class, and your mastery of them will be evaluated through your performance on short quizzes, two papers, and two exams.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

The readings for this course will consist of a free online textbook titled The American Yawp at http://www.americanyawp.com plus other materials posted to D2L. That means that you don’t need to buy anything for this course. Yay! However, it also means that you will must have consistent internet access in order to keep up with the weekly assignments. You will find it difficult to read these materials on your phone. If you do not have access to a tablet or computer, you should plan to spend a few hours at the library every week in order to complete the assignments.

I have done my best to keep out-of-class assignments to about six hours a week, the minimum amount permitted per SFA policy 5.4 and the federal definition of a three-credit hour class. However, most of you can expect to work less some weeks and more when major assignments are due, so that six hours works out to an average.
**COURSE QUESTIONS, THEMES AND TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit #1</th>
<th>Columbus Day: Why is Columbus Day so controversial? Should it be celebrated as a national holiday? (Causation, Complexity)</th>
<th>Paper Option #1: Feb. 7</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 23-30</td>
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<td>Unit #2</td>
<td>The Puritans: Was Puritan culture the foundation of American values? What can Puritan society teach us about the “otherness” of the past? (Context, Connections, Complexity)</td>
<td>Paper Option #2: Feb. 21</td>
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<td>Feb. 6-13</td>
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<td>Unit #3</td>
<td>The Revolution: How revolutionary was the American Revolution? In what ways did it change American life? In what ways did life stay the same? (Causation, Context, Complexity)</td>
<td>Paper Option #3: Mar. 7</td>
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<td>Feb. 20-27</td>
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<td>Unit #4</td>
<td>The Constitution: What did the Framers hope to achieve with the Constitution? What specific problems of the 1780s were they trying to solve? Does knowing that context affect how we interpret the Constitution today? (Context, Connections)</td>
<td>Midterm: Mar. 13</td>
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<td>Mar. 5-12</td>
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<td>Unit #5</td>
<td>Religion: Was America founded as a Christian nation? What exactly do we mean when we say that? What does it mean to be a Christian nation? (Change, Context, Connections)</td>
<td>Paper Option #4: Apr. 11</td>
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<td>Mar. 27-Apr. 3</td>
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<td>Unit #6</td>
<td>Slavery: Why did Americans choose slavery, despite believing in freedom? Why was slavery so vital to the success of early American capitalism? (Causation, Complexity)</td>
<td>Primary Source Paper: May 2</td>
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<td>Apr. 10-24</td>
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<td>Unit #7</td>
<td>The Civil War: What was the cause of the Civil War? Why is this such a controversial topic today, so long after the fact? Why is states’ rights listed as a cause of the war in the history standards for Texas public schools if historians agree that this is a myth? (Context, Connections, Complexity)</td>
<td>Final exam: May 15</td>
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<td>Apr. 24-May 9</td>
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**THE FIVE C’S OF HISTORICAL REASONING**

What is historical reasoning? What do historians do when they reason about the past? We will use five main concepts to help you develop your historical reasoning skills.

1. **Change and Continuity:** Historians debate what has changed over time and what has remained the same.
2. **Causation:** Historians debate the causes of historical events. Since history is an interpretive discipline, we often disagree about causality.
3. **Context:** Historians insist that the past must be understood on its own terms. Any historical event, person, idea must be placed in the context of its historical era to be interpreted.
4. **Contingency and Connections:** Historians are aware that events happen for a variety of reasons, which are often interconnected. Change one factor, and the event might not have happened at all. This idea helps us to remember that historical events are not inevitable.
5. **Complexity:** Historical reasoning is not about memorizing dates and names. It is about making sense of the messiness of the past, in all its complexity. That often means recognizing that different historical groups experienced events in different ways.
ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

<table>
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<th>Reading exercises:</th>
<th>Weekly on D2L. Requires a minimum score of 80% to count. May be repeated.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unit paper:</td>
<td>Exact date varies by topic, but each paper is due on the Thursday after its unit.</td>
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<td>Midterm exam:</td>
<td>Wednesday, March 13</td>
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<td>Primary source essay:</td>
<td>Thursday, May 2</td>
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<td>Final exam:</td>
<td>Wednesday, May 15 at 4:00</td>
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ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEWS

I will provide instructions for all assignments on D2L. For now, this should give you an idea of what you have signed up for.

Readings: This class requires a deep commitment to learning through reading and writing. Although the readings are not very long, they are complicated and will require you to take careful notes. Students who have completed ENG 131 and ENG 132 are more likely to be successful in this course. Students who have trouble with reading, especially students who are currently enrolled in IRW 099, may find the course difficult. That doesn’t mean that you are doomed to fail, but you may need to work with a tutor at the AARC. There will be weekly reading exercises posted on D2L. You may attempt these as many times as necessary to demonstrate comprehension, which may vary from simple completion of the exercise to a minimum score on a quiz.

Unit Papers: Four of the units will conclude with a short paper assignment, about three pages in length. These papers will ask you to evaluate historical evidence and will give you practice with the type of analysis you will do on the exams and the major paper you will write at the end of the semester. To earn a high score, you must demonstrate a strong grasp of the assigned readings and competency in the relevant historical reasoning skills as outlined in the instructions for each paper. Four unit papers will be assigned, but you only need to complete one of them. You may rewrite a paper or complete additional papers to improve your grade.

Primary source essay: We will finish unit #6 on slavery with a slightly longer paper, about 4-6 pages. By this point you will be ready for this more complex assignment, in which you will compare conflicting arguments about the nature of slavery in America.

Exams: The midterm and the final will include a mix of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. The final will include a limited cumulative sections. Fair warning: My exams are long. You will need the whole time. On the other hand, I work hard to make sure that the exams reflect the practice material.

COURSE POLICIES AND OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY POLICY

STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Course responsibilities: You should think of this course like joining a health club. As your personal trainer, it is my responsibility to show you how to do everything that is required of you. I give you my word that I will stick to the syllabus, so far as policies go. I will do my best to keep to the schedule and promise to notify you of any changes. On the other hand, it is your responsibility to exercise and eat right—that is, to come to class, keep up with the reading, and prepare for assignments. The grade you earn is determined by the quality of your effort, not necessarily by the amount of time you spend.

Consultations: I take my responsibilities as an instructor seriously. You are invited to come to my office hours to discuss readings, lectures or
anything else that you have concerns or questions about. If you are having problems in the class, the worst possible thing you can do is wait until the end of the semester to say something. Let me know right away, so that I can help you.

**Make-ups:** No make-up exams will be given unless you make prior arrangements to miss the regularly scheduled exam. If you miss an exam due to an emergency on the day of an exam, you will not be allowed to take a make-up until you provide written documentation to justify your absence.

**Professionalism:** Students are expected to be on time and to behave in a professional manner. Disruptive or distracting behavior will not be tolerated. Students reading non-course material or disrupting the class in any way will be asked to leave the room. The penalty for cheating and plagiarism will range from failure of the assignment to failure of the course and referral to your dean, depending of the severity of the incident. We will practice avoiding accidental plagiarism in class, and I will help you learn to write about sources in your own words. I understand that it is difficult to do sometimes. Be aware that I am very patient with students learning a new skill, but I have no tolerance for deliberate plagiarism.

**Technology:** While I understand that students sometimes need access to phones for family emergencies, it is easy to become distracted by technology. Please be careful with your phones, so that you and those around you can focus on what we are doing. **Laptops and tablets may not be used on lecture days. Research shows that students who take notes by hand get higher grades than students who take notes on a laptop.** I will be more flexible on workshop days, so that you do not have to print out D2L readings.

**Academic Integrity (SFA Policy 4.1)**

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam; falsifying or inventing of any information, including citations, on an assignment; and/or; helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one’s own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to: submitting an assignment as one’s own work when it is at least partly the work of another person; submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source; and/or, incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

You may read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student_academic_dishonesty.pdf](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student_academic_dishonesty.pdf)

**Withheld Grades (SFA Policy 5.5)**

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**Disability Statement (SFA Policy 6.1)**

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. Together we’ll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity.

You are also encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services to begin this conversation.
or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met. The Office of Disability Services works with students to identify accommodations that remove barriers to learning. The ODS is located in the Human Services Building, Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD). For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic-accomodation-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf

OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON THE CORE CURRICULUM

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has identified six core learning objectives: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, Teamwork, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. SFA is committed to the improvement of its general education core curriculum by regular assessment of student performance on these six objectives.

HISTORY DEPARTMENT PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

This is a general education core curriculum course and no specific program learning outcomes for this major are addressed in this course.

I know that you can’t master historical reasoning in one semester—at least at the level of advanced history majors or grad students. That’s okay. But if you commit to the course, you will gain a basic proficiency, enough to be a smart consumer of historical information in your daily life.

"HISTORY IS THE FICTION WE INVENT TO PERSUADE OURSELVES THAT EVENTS ARE KNOWABLE AND THAT LIFE HAS ORDER AND DIRECTION. THAT’S WHY EVENTS ARE ALWAYS REINTERPRETED WHEN VALUES CHANGE. WE NEED NEW VERSIONS OF HISTORY TO ALLOW FOR OUR CURRENT PREJUDICES."

- CALVIN
Students of history
should understand...

History: History is an interpretative account of the past supported by evidence that survives. History is not simply an account of "what happened"; the past cannot be known except through a disciplined process of problem solving.

The Past: The object of historical study is the past. Recognizing the "pastness of the past" directs historians to understand people of the past by contextualizing their actions: what they were trying to accomplish, the nature of their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, the culturally and historically situated assumptions that guided thought and action.

Historical Evidence: Historians use primary and secondary sources to make sense of the past. History students should know that primary and secondary sources come in diverse forms, represent diverse perspectives, and have distinct strengths and limitations as evidence about the past.

Complex Causality: Historians are intensely interested in the how and why of historical events. Historical accounts are multiple and layered, avoiding monicausal explanations and reductionist thinking.

Significance: Significance is the indefinite standard by which historians determine what questions are worth asking: what parts of the past are worth teaching, learning, and remembering; and which pieces of the extant past properly belong in a meaningful, coherent account.

Students of history
should be able to...

Evaluate Historical Accounts: Recognize historical explanations in their most common forms: narrative, exposition, causal model, and analogy; identify an author's interpretation and critically scrutinize the evidence and analysis used to support it; and critically evaluate, compare, and synthesize historical accounts.

Interpret Primary Sources: Distinguish primary from secondary sources; assess the credibility of sources and make judgments about their usefulness and limitations as evidence about the past; consider how the historical context in which information was originally created, accessed, and distributed affects its message; and address questions of genre, content, audience, perspective, and purpose to generate subtexts that illuminate the intentions of the author.

Apply chronological reasoning: Take account of the role of time, sequencing, and periodization in historical narratives. Contextualize: Place an event, actor, or primary source within the context of its time in order to interpret its meaning and significance.

Construct a historical argument using primary sources: Construct acceptable historical accounts that interpret the past using primary sources as evidence for knowledge claims in ways that demonstrate understanding of historical concepts, especially the nature of historical evidence, interpretation, and perspective.